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ABSTRACT

Due to industrialization, urban growth and an increase in the migrant population, Australia has been transformed from a mono-cultural to a multi-cultural society. The inadequate response of the society to dealing with multi-culturalism has reached a crisis state. Social and educational changes must be instituted to resolve the tensions and conflicts of a multi-ethnic society. Successful change implies a search for legitimate social and educational values and expectations of ethnically different groups. Educators must recognize the Anglo-conformist dominance of education and revise their values with regard to the entire curriculum process. The educational system must be reconstructed in ethnic terms by (1) developing curriculum in conjunction with parents, children and community representatives; (2) incorporating ethnic teachers from overseas into the system; (3) creating resource centers to provide support services and design materials for 'migrant' teachers; (4) encouraging ethnically different teachers to teach their peers; (5) educating teachers to define their courses in cross-cultural terms; (6) extending student programs for ethnically specific teacher training in universities and colleges; and (7) evaluating the needs of ethnic groups of children in terms of the children's perception and expression of those needs. (WI)

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# OBSTACLES TO MULTICULTURALISM : THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

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## Obstacles to Multiculturalism: The Australian Experience

There is a story from Greek Mythology about Procrustes who was a very hospitable Greek. Procrustes wouldn't let travellers go past his house at night; he was concerned fro them. No, he would invite them in. He would wine them and dine them and even offer them a bed for the night. He had only one idiosyncrasy (who hasn't, says the story teller) Procrustes wanted everything to be nice and neat. So if the traveller was too short Procrustes had him stretched; only a little, just as much as was needed. And if his guest was too long, well Procrustes had him slightly reduced - by cutting off his feet or his head!

This is an image of Australia - that as a host community we have tried to make ethnic groups literally and figuratively fit into our society as we have thought and decided.

Unfortunately we have been too superficially aware of and respondent to the rapid and radical changes our society has undergone in these past three decades. Such change is a world phenomenon and demands a new world consciousness on the part of us all.

So, as Professor Jayasuriya points out (1977), the historic self-portrait of Australia as a big egalitarian country - "of a frontier ethos, of ruggedly individualistic pioneers, who distrust unorthodox tastes and opinion and intellectualism, who believe there can be an absence of social difference", and who respect only mateship, not cultural prestige and authority - this self portrait, this image of Australia, is also a myth.

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A social 'crisis' exists in Australia today and it is partly due to the widening discrepancy between this myth of Australian egalitarianism and the reality of the social and cultural diversity which is our present experience.

Australian society has been transformed. Industrialisation, massive urban growth, and above all the huge increase in our 'migrant' population, have dramatically altered our social character. Australia is no longer a relatively simple society. There are value conflicts, inequalities, uncertainties, and dynamic changes continually pervading our experience. Most significantly about 3½ million 'migrants' have entered Australia since World War II (1945). By 1980 about one Australian in three will have come from a non English speaking country. We are no longer mono-cultural; our definition is one of diversity. We are multi-cultural - and show this to be true daily in stores, in factories, workshops, churches, schools and on the sporting fields. This point is perhaps well known and somewhat accepted. The next point is not so easily digestible.

The egalitarian ideology may have fitted the old secure, relatively simple and united, and predictable order prior to World War II. But it is no longer applicable.

And ethnic communities do not in any case act in accordance with this egalitarian ideology. Their behaviour, values and their expectations of Australian society, their society, are in conflict with the assimilationist and conformist pressures that have been imposed upon them.

This also is part of the crisis - a crisis of values and cultural relations.

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The first obstacle, then, to multiculturalism in Australia, has been an inadequate response to this fact of change in our Australian society. The future is overspilling into our present. We require a future orientation to all our problems, social and educational, not a projection of the inadequate linear dimensions of past oriented thinking.

We have reached a crisis state also because the way in which we set about resolving the tensions and conflicts of this new experience of social and cultural relations will shape the social and educational future of our children.

In this respect it is important for us in Australia to learn more of what we mean when we talk to each other about 'culture'. Professor Bowen has aptly restated the case (1977). Responding to the challenge of a multi-cultural society implies, of course, going beyond our cliches and slogans to work for solutions with moral and imaginative justice. But in this use of the term culture, as Talcott Parsons shows (1952), we must recognize three things. The first is that obviously culture can mean a different concept to different groups of people. Secondly, assuming that culture may be seen as the total patterned ways of life of a society, then these are learned and shared and transmitted. But, - here is the area of our response - culture is both produced by a society and is something which is the determinant of systems of social interaction. The point is that culture is not the same as the social system because "culture can be diffused from one social system to another". (Parsons: 1952). Our understanding of culture therefore is dangerously misconceived if on the one hand we confuse culture with patterns of social exclusiveness, or if on the other hand culture is construed as something static and permanent.

Based upon this kind of understanding, our response to this "obstacle" of change is a response to a concept of the future in which ethnic communities are joined in the process of sharing culture and not keeping culture to themselves. It is a concept of the future in which we work on the principle that sharing culture is better than imposing it. (The term sharing is used deliberately, for it does not mean watering down some cultures for the sake of others.)

In Australia this has become an educational question of the first order. The second significant obstacle to multiculturalism has been an educational one. Research is needed to provide a deeper understanding, firstly, of what culture actually means and implies. We already know that we have overlapping of cultures and changes in cultures. We must know what the concepts of culture actually imply before we significantly change Curriculum. Secondly our approach towards surmounting the obstacle must include an appreciation of the true nature of the position of 'migrants' in our Australian society. Ignorance of historic facts, and of the realities of the social experience of the 3½ million new and ethnically different settlers constitutes a significant obstacle to the development of multiculturalism in Australia. For example, we must understand, and accept the implications of the fact, that since 1860 (not merely since 1945) 'migrants' have come to Australia by the direct invitation of official and governmental authority. The absolute vast majority of 'migrants' came to Australia because they were invited here, officially and publicly.

Then, our response to the multi-cultural reality of society in Australia means understanding that ethnic communities upon arrival and establishment here(often into the Australian 'ghettos') have not

remained static. It just has not been possible for them to reproduce in Australia the Greek or Italian or Turkish communities as they are in their respective countries. As Pino Bosi imaginatively states it, "It's easier for an Australian Aborigine to become Italian if he's raised in Italy, than it is for the children of the President of Italy to remain Italian if they grow up in Australia". (1977: 40)

Part of the frustration of ethnic communities is that Australian society which insists on their changing in one direction has not understood that ethnic groups have changed. These 'ghettos', so-called, were not and are not mere transplants from the "old" countries. In a sense, adapting to and working for the future in Australia has been a more noticeable characterisitc of ethnic groups than of the host Australian communities.

Attempting to overcome this kind of obstacle also means a deeper, more profound search for understandings (and educationally, for incorporating into the Curriculum Process) of the legitimate social and educational values and expectations of ethnically different groups. I am reminded of the time in Sydney when a meeting of Greek parents with teachers of a local state school discovered for the first time that they each were operating on a quite different definition of the term 'education'. The school had gone on - with all fair intention and ignorance - defining education in terms of learning and the up-bringing of children, that is in terms of values; the Greek parents there expected and believed the Australian teachers' task was to be confined to learning in the purer sense.

The educational obstacle to multiculturalism in Australia has crystallised in at least two ways:

1) A much clearer understanding of the values and expectations o. ethnic communities regarding the entire Curriculum Process is a vital factor of the challenge before us. For instance we have witnessed the growth of separate ethnic schools. There is some dispute even among ethnic communities as to whether separate ethnic schools is a good or bad educational development. The majority opinion seems to be in favour (and from the point of view of Italian community in Tasmania they have been essential to the educational survival of the Italian children).

It has been asserted (Bowen, 1977) that our response to the educational challenge is to know who are articulating such values and from where they are derived. "This in itself" Bowen argues "lies at the heart of the whole problem of ethnic concern and one which we have as yet only lightly considered in Australia". In addition of course it is quite conceivable that Australian educators could learn a good deal about education and the Curriculum Process by being joined with the teachers and organizers of ethnic schools. Part of the challenge here, is to the possibility of separate ethnic schools pre-figuring alternative societies in Australia. Our response to this challenge is for joint research, as representative of our society as possible, to find answers to such questions as are posed here. Or Australians must ask, must our educational future be satisfied with a continuance of the deep social and educational divisions and inequalities we experience at present.

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2) The social and cultural conflict which has been referred to here typically implies for its resolution a total review of the objectives of the educational system.

The priority of our educational response to multiculturalism in Australia is to recognize once and for all that ethnically different children have suffered educational disadvantage long enough.

Primarily this means a recognition of the Anglo-conformist dominance of education in our schools. We have required ethnically different children to surrender to the pressures of assimilation. As J.J. Smolicz (1971) has warned, Australian schools in their socialization role have "functioned as assimilationist agencies in the strictly Anglo-conformist meaning of that word ... the school makes no allowance for the cultural differences among the children and effectively reinforces the natural conformist tendencies of the young" ... "ethnic cultures have been allowed to disintegrate before they have been given a chance to diversity, replenish, and enrich the Anglo Saxon core culture. It is within the boundaries of these empty shells now devoid of their original cultural meaning that an individual may remain from the cradle to the grave". To brand this as overstatement is to deny the evidence which still exists.

Ethnically different children have literally been forced into what June English calls a 'brutal bargain' - to assume that school is right and home is wrong, so that home must be rejected if these children are to succeed at school. Alternatively they have become remedial problems, behavioural problems, truant, and potential drop-outs. Or they have withdrawn quietly and failed because their deficiency in language and cultural alienation from school has retarded their achievement, and because the essential emotional support and security from the home has been lacking.

The challenge specifically in language terms is to redress the imbalance between the legitimate requirement of the learning of English, and the continued preservation of their first and psychologically fundamental original language. Such has been the price paid by these Australian children for being ethnically different.

Observe the case of a thirteen year old Greek girl. She is asked to write a poem about being sick in bed. This is her effort in English.

Being in bed alone rugged up
in the warm blankets
Thinking of what a very dull day
it is outside
Looking around the room feeling
dizzy
To sit up in bed and seeing two
things instead of one
And imagining things that are
not happening
Acting like I am not alive and
dreaming about everything.

Here is the poem on the same theme, this time in translation from her own Greek language.

Alone in the empty nest
The bird isn't singing any more
Covered with grey wings
It looks sadly around
The clouds grey and black
Are waiting for rain to come
And the sun behind the dark mountains
Isn't shining anymore ....

Of course the children must learn English, but the evidence of failure in school and cultural 'mutilation' is clear; on the other hand the

potential for educational success by ethnically different children is also clear.

Two research examples confirm these points.

The 1974-75 authoritative study, undertaken by three governments in close collaboration, investigated a large number of schools in which there was a broad range of ethnically different backgrounds. "Severe retardation of both locally and overseas born children was universal in the schools studied. On the average children were at least two years behind in normal attainments. Coupled with low levels of achievement was a high drop-out rate for secondary school pupils". The Report of the Commissioner for Community Relations notes that statistics show clearly that no fewer than one third of all children suffering educational disadvantage because of language are born in Australia. The report then states, "It is the perversity of assimilationist educators to continue to call these children 'migrant' when they are in fact natives of Australia". (1976: 33).

On the other hand the large scale study reported by Dr. Marion de Lemos of the educational achievement of migrant children of primary age (published in 1975) concluded that there are no differences in the potential achievement of Australian and non-English origin 'migrant' children. Indeed the mean scores, on the testing programme, of the Northern European group were usually higher than the Australian group.

Our response to such challenges are at least an urgent development and evaluation of more effective teaching programmes in multicultural terms, universally and right across the Curriculum.

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Finally the response to this most significant obstacle, the educational challenge before us, is to a dramatic reconstruction of the educational system in ethnic terms. I have advanced a few propositions towards this end.

(1) Despite the promise of multi-cultural studies programmes it is important that all agents in the Curriculum Process be joined in the building of such programmes from outset - that is, not only departmental officers and teachers but teacher education personnel in universities and colleges, and parents, children, and representatives of the community. This is a tall order. But Curriculum development has suffered continually for many years because all the essential agents in process were not present from the inception of such development.

(2) The exploration of the means whereby Ethnic teachers from overseas (as well as those already here) can be incorporated into the system as aides to the child migrant branches of Departments of Education. The challenge here is a general one - to the inadequate conservatism of educational systems which refuse to acknowledge their contributions in future terms on the grounds of so-called qualifications.

(3) The redistribution of our material and personnel resources whereby we facilitate the present fragmented application of these resources. We may refer to the Ten Scheme in South Australia where a regional group of ten schools have developed a Resources Centre, developing and evaluating materials and providing substantial support services to the 'migrant' teachers within the region. Exciting potential is being created there, the possibility being also that no single school and no single 'migrant' teacher is required to face the multi-cultural challenges alone.

(4) Related to such a regional arrangement is the possibility for multi age clusters of team taught children in schools where, for example, ethnically different children can be incorporated into the task of teaching their peers - the older children teaching the younger, the more advanced helping the less achieving.

(5) The immediate review of courses of Teacher Education in Universities and Colleges in terms of a new definition of their course development in cross-cultural terms.
Fundamentally this means facing the challenge of changing the present mono-lingual and mono-cultural value and attitude conceptions of most students who are to teach in what are actually multi-cultural school systems.

(6) The extension of studentship programmes for trainee teachers - that is, studentships for ethnically specific teacher training in universities and colleges, in cooperation with Departments of Education. This would include Teacher Education programmes designed to work out Curriculum in ethnic terms.

(7) Mindful of Jean Piaget's advice, that if you want to know how children may learn, look at the child: the evaluation of the needs of ethnic groups of children, in terms of the recognition and understanding of how those needs are expressed and perceived by the children themselves, is a long neglected area of attention.

Such propositions as these are of course part of the emerging and promising efforts from various quarters in Australia - both government and community sponsored - to effect appropriate multi-cultural change in educational terms.

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In the total Australian context two particular examples of real thrusts to surmount the obstacles to multiculturalism are notable.

One is the establishment by the Government of a Commission for Community Relations, whose task forces under the direction of the Commissioner, the Hon. A.J. Grassby, have produced in 1976, and 1977, two highly influential reports. One specific dimension of these reports is to bring to the attention of the Australian people the evidence of ethnic discrimination brought into highlight by the administration of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. It is important to see that these reports represent also a whole series of initiatives which are being persisted with by the Commissioner and his department across the country in order to "combat the prejudice, bigotry, and racial discrimination", which has existed at all levels of Australian society. The efforts to surmount this obstacle have never been stronger in Australia's history.

The second thrust is reflected in a series of "multi cultural" Conferences which have been sponsored by the department of the Commissioner for Community Relations but responsibility for whose arrangement and follow up activity, has been in the hands of State community personnel.

Within the process of this development the National Multi Cultural Conference was held in Canberra in March of this year. Fifteen pages of resolutions crystallized from this conference and were presented via deputations to the Prime Minister, to the Federal Minister for Education, to the Minister for Labour and to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. More significantly, as a consequence, a task force of sixteen key people have led a series of public meetings in



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the Australian Capital Territory under the specified headings of Schooling, Tertiary Education - including Teacher Training, Law, Health and Welfare, and Media. From these a larger action group has been formed representing the ethnically diverse community. Such a group (and their cooperatives) are beginning to form an effective data base for proposals whereby the Governments and communities can be influenced from a number of directions. They form a confederation of action for initiatives designed to bring about community development characterised by multi-culturalism. Their tripartite thrusts - towards the 'estblishment', towards Ethnic Groups generally, towards the academics (regarded as the seers and prophets as well as the researchers) - are designed to bring about fundamental social change from assimilationism to an interactionism upon which the development of multiculturalism in Australia must depend.

In educational terms, a twofold question is still being resolved

(1) to what extent do such appropriate changes exist together in all relevant areas of education - as a revolution of the mind as well as in Curriculum reform.

(2) to what extent do the moves for change come from a deep and profound reappraisal of our objectives for a new multi cultural definition of education, for the future of Australia and for Australia's children.

Above all our response to the challenge of obstacles to a multi cultural society means sharing, not imposing; it means a dissatisfied patience not a presumptous divisiveness; a revolution

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of our minds in terms of a concept of a future society in which education (as well as social relationships and political rights) reflects our implicit demonstrated belief in an enhancing cultural diversity and a natural distributive justice.

William Ramsay.

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